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# ÉLISÉE RECLUS ON THE UNITED STATES.\*

BY

GEO. C. HURLBUT.

In this, the sixteenth volume of his great work, Mr. Reclus considers his subject under the following heads :  
 1. General View : Extent, Structure and Natural Divisions. 2. Primitive Inhabitants. 3. The Settlers in the United States: Whites and Blacks. 4. The Apalachians and the States of the Atlantic Slope. 5. The Region of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi. 6 The Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Slope. 7. Demography and Statistics of the North American Union. 8. Government and Administration of the American Republic.

A table on p. 6 shows the successive additions to the territory of the United States, and their estimated area in square kilometres : †

Original Colonies (without the Trans-Alleghany region).....	1,000,000
Territory ceded by Great Britain in 1782.....	1,040,000
Louisiana, purchased of France in 1803.....	2,575,000
Florida, " " Spain in 1819.....	153,500
Northern Maine, ceded by England in 1842.....	28,500
Oregon Territory, " " 1846.....	520,000
Texas, annexed in 1845.....	710,550
New Mexico and California, ceded by Mexico in 1848.....	1,760,240
Mesilla Territory, purchased of Mexico in 1853.....	46,500
Alaska, purchased of Russia in 1867.....	1 495,380
San Juan Archipelago, ceded by England in 1872.....	1,690
	<hr/> 9,331,360

\* Nouvelle Géographie Universelle. La Terre et Les Hommes. Par Elisée Reclus. XVI. Les États Unis, contenant une grande carte des États-Unis, 4 cartes en couleur, 194 cartes intercalées dans le texte, et 65 vues ou types gravés sur bois. 8°. Paris, librairie Hachette et Cie., 1892.

† One thousand square kilometres are equal to 386.12 square miles.

The area of Europe, according to the same authority (*Nouv. Géog. Univ.*, Tome I., p. 21), is 9,860,000 square kilometres. Mr. Reclus regards the reports of the Government explorations beyond the Mississippi as "undoubtedly the richest special library which exists in the world"; and he praises the work on the Topographical Atlas now in course of publication by the Geological Survey, though in comparing the sheets with those of similar maps issued in Europe he finds the American atlas surprisingly poor in names.\*

The construction of the United States territory, like that of the continent of North America, is remarkably simple, with the vast central plain and the mountain systems on the two oceans.

Taking the natural boundaries of the four great regions, Mr. Reclus presents the following comparative view of their extent and population in 1890 :

	Area.	Population.	Density (to the sq. kil.).
Appalachian.....	900,000 sq. kil.	25,520,000	23
Mississippi Basin.....	4,785,980 "	34,120,000	9.7
Rocky Mountains.....	2,150,000 "	3,080,000	0.9
Alaska .....	1,495,380 "	30,000	0.02
	<hr/> 9,331,360 "	<hr/> 62,750,000	<hr/> 6.7

In the account of the primitive inhabitants Mr. Reclus advances no new theory. He observes the re-

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\* On p. 15 Mr. Reclus states that the name of *Dixie*, popularly applied to the Southern States, was derived from Mason and Dixon's boundary line between Pennsylvania and Maryland. This may be doubted. Webster's Dictionary (ed. 1877, p. 1556) says that when slavery existed in New York, one "Dixy" owned a large tract of land on Manhattan Island and a number of slaves, and that this tract was the original Dixie's land. John Dixy is mentioned in two of the documents relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York (Vol. II., p. 715, Vol. III., pp. 169-170) in 1674 and 1667. Mason and Dixon's line was surveyed in 1763-67.

semblances between the works of the mound-builders and the stone structures of Mexico and Central America, and he seems to incline to the belief that the races, who left these memorials behind them, were the ancestors of the present Indians.

The sketch of the Indian tribes and of the general Indian character follows the best authorities ; and the whites are then described.

" We should seek in vain," says Mr. Reclus, " to fix the exact proportions of the different races, now fused into homogeneous peoples in our European countries ; since we are not only unacquainted with the degree in which they mingled, but we have yet to settle the question as to the identity of populations which bear the same name in history. In the United States it is more easy to trace the white European ancestry, because we possess, with only a few unimportant breaks, the annals of the colonization for three centuries ; but, if we know all the ethnic elements in the American people, it would be rash to affirm in what degree they have contributed to form the mass of the nation, and what particular traits they have given to its character."

It would be wrong to consider the people of the Colonies, as they existed before the great modern immigration began, as purely English ;\* and the North Americans are, in fact, a new people, modified by crossing and by the effect of a climate different from that in which their ancestors lived.

" There flows in the veins of the white American,"

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\* Mr. Reclus says (p. 75), on the authority of John C. Fleming (*N. Am. Review*, Aug., 1891), that only eighteen million Americans are English or of English descent.

we are told, "the blood of the Frenchman and the Englishman, the Irishman and the German, the Spaniard and the Scandinavian, mingled, whatever may be said, with some drops of Negro and of Indian blood." \*

The people of Virginia, it appears, notwithstanding the proverbial *F. F. V.*, are of plebeian origin, and descend for the most part from the first colonists (workingmen and adventurers) and from the crowd of those bound to service.

The settlement of Massachusetts by the Puritans was not without a certain proportion of the same domestic element, which Mr. Reclus finds in Virginia ; and he does not fail to note as an *on dit* that, after the Pilgrims had landed, the *Mayflower* was sent to the coast of Africa for a cargo of negroes for the West India market.

New York was settled by the Dutch at Albany and by M. Virlet d' Aoust's French Flemings at Nouvelle-Avesnes, afterwards usurped by the Dutch and named Nieuwe Amsterdam. To these were added in no very long time Jews, Frenchmen, Germans, Swiss, Italians, Englishmen and New Englanders.

The North Carolinians, mostly of British and Irish origin, are declared to be the people who have best preserved the purity of their race ; while the settlers in South Carolina were of various countries and stations, British, Dutch, Germans, *convicts* and domestics, West India planters and French Protestants. The Georgians were mostly British and Germans.

Kentucky and Tennessee are among the districts of

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\* p. 76.

the United States with the purest British basis of population.

The logic of Mr. Reclus' analysis seems to halt, in places, as if to wait for the courtesy, which has fallen behind.

The advance of the Colonists into the wide Mississippi Valley was in two great streams, one flowing from New England, New York and Pennsylvania into the territory which is now divided among the States of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Michigan ; the other the stream from Virginia into Kentucky and Tennessee, and the States beyond the Mississippi.

Intellectually and morally, the people of New England are the leaders of the Americans.\* They have the supremacy in thought, in literature and in art, as well as in practical science ; and they may claim as their own work both the Revolution and the abolition of slavery.

The Irish and the Germans, though counted by millions, are both in process of absorption and must, in a relatively short time, disappear as distinct elements of the population. The other white races, Scandinavians, French Canadians, Italians, will also be lost in the American nation. The case is different with the seven or eight millions of the African race, natives of the American

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\* In contrasting the *physique* of the New Englanders with that of the Englishmen, Mr. Reclus says (p. 88): " In common with the other Americans they are relatively calm and they have their emotions under control ; hence the *sobriquet* of *white-livered*, which has been given to them by their countrymen of the South." Mr. Reclus misunderstands the word *white-livered*, and it would be interesting to know where he finds the evidence for the Southern application of the term to the Yankees, while he declares that it denotes a characteristic common to all Americans.

soil, but considered for the most part as foreigners, not to be assimilated. Mr. Reclus states the problem and the various solutions which have been proposed, without offering one of his own ; an evidence of self-restraint in a writer who does not hesitate to affirm that "the American negroes may be considered as having on the average from three-fourths to seven-eighths of European blood." \*

There is not, and there cannot be, any statistical information on this point, and conscientious persons, really acquainted with the Southern States, will not commit themselves to estimates of proportion. It is certain that the mixed blood shows itself, and equally certain that very much the larger part of the colored population of the United States is composed of true negroes.

Mr. Reclus describes in a clear and satisfactory manner the geological and geographical features, the climate, fauna and flora of the Appalachian region, including in this the Florida peninsula and keys, and gives a brief account of each State, beginning with Maine. He does not fail to emphasize the pre-eminence of Massachusetts in great men by quoting from Mr. Henry Cabot Lodge the interesting calculation that, of 14,243 Americans classed in Appleton's Cyclopædia as "distinguished," 2686, or nearly one-fifth, were natives of Massachusetts. The capital of the State is the worthy centre of so much greatness, and Mr. Reclus

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\* . . . c'est ainsi que peu à peu les nègres américains ont cessé dans leur ensemble d'être des noirs purs comme leurs ancêtres d'Afrique, et qu'on peut les considérer en moyenne comme ayant des trois quarts aux sept huitièmes de sang européen.—*Les États-Unis*, p. 699.

fully appreciates its schools and colleges, its scientific, literary and artistic institutions.\* The Art Museum, he declares, would be remarkable even in Europe.

New York City presents the greatest contrasts in its different quarters. The older part, which still possesses some historical monuments among enormous modern buildings of ten, fifteen and even twenty stories in height, is a dark labyrinth, crowded during the day with merchants and capitalists and their *employés*, and abandoned at night to the janitors of the buildings and the inhabitants of the neighboring tenement houses. The muddy streets along the river front pass through low and common houses and rickety sheds and unsightly docks. In the upper streets, however, and especially in Madison Avenue, the eye rests with satisfaction on many beautiful buildings. The finest edifice is St. Patrick's Cathedral.

It is doubtful whether New York or Paris has the larger population, but in the magnitude of its commerce, foreign and domestic, New York unquestionably surpasses Liverpool or London.

The chief distinction of Albany is its age, compared with that of other places in the Northern States ; and next to its age its State House, which has already cost more than 100,000,000 francs.

The typical State of the Mississippi Basin is Illinois, which possesses all the geographical advantages, even

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\* Mr. Reclus has a fatal facility in explaining local names and phrases. Boston, he says, is called the *Hub*, "as if it were the centre around which turns the wheel of American fortune." The name was first applied by Oliver Wendell Holmes in the *Autocrat of the Breakfast Table*: "Boston State House is the *hub* of the Solar System. You couldn't pry that out of a Boston man." . . .



those which seem to be irreconcilable with each other. It is continental, for it occupies the centre of the Mississippi watershed, and stands where the great commercial lines from the north and the south, from the east and the west, cross one another ; and it possesses at the same time the advantages of an insular country by its position between navigable waters. The Mississippi on the west, the Ohio on the south, the Wabash on the east, and on the north the Rock and the Illinois and Lake Michigan girdle it with ports. The Atlantic Ocean may be said to reach it by the St. Lawrence and the chain of the Great Lakes and to make a Mediterranean in the land itself. Add to these advantages the extreme fertility of the soil, the gentle slope of the land and its immense beds of coal and other minerals, and there is no difficulty in explaining the rapid progress of the State in power and influence.

Chicago, the commercial centre of the State, is now the second city of the New World in population. The census of 1891 gives to it 1,208,669 inhabitants, of whom less than 300,000 are native Americans. The lake front is 38 kilometres (24 miles) in length, and the average width of the city is 10 kilometres (6 miles).

Mr. Reclus is impressed by the energy of the Chicago people, and their ambition to do things in a large way. They are proud of their enormous houses, crowded from top to bottom ; and they show their skill in packing, in more ways than one. Mr. Reclus appears to know of a "monumental building, in the commercial part of the city, which contains in its business offices, piled on each other for 15 or 20 stories, a temporary population of 20,000 persons."

In many of the buildings the style is incoherent and even grotesquely bad, but the architects, working under new conditions, are full of audacity and they frequently achieve success. If Mr. Reclus were asked to compare the structures of the new city by the side of Lake Michigan with those of an ancient metropolis in Europe, his thought would turn to Florence and her noble palaces, which are at the same time fortresses. Thought is free, and often whimsical; but the confession is, in any case, an interesting bit of personal history.

In science and the arts Chicago, although it possesses colleges and museums and is the head of the Western book-trade, cannot be held to rival Boston and New York; but, even if destined to remain relatively inferior to these cities in culture, Chicago has "indisputably the greatest number of chances of becoming the centre of vitality for the whole confederation."\*

More than 200 pages in all are devoted to the Mississippi Valley, which seems to be regarded as the distinctively American portion of the country. Mr. Reclus is most at home in describing the natural features and the geology of a territory, and he takes an American's delight in the vastness of his subject.

From the Valley he passes to the Rocky Mountains and the Pacific Coast.

In the seventh chapter, on the "Demography and Statistics of the North American Union," the results of the census of 1890 are studied and analyzed. Allowance is made in general terms for the errors in several

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\*Actuellement la ville qui paraît avoir le plus de chances pour devenir le foyer vital de toute la confédération est sans conteste Chicago. (*Les États-Unis*, p. 655.)

of the great decennial enumerations, but a special point is made against the last census in these words: "In 1890, it would have been easy to obtain better results, but the immense labor was not entrusted to the most capable, independently of their political opinions; the profits of it were jealously reserved for the influential electors of the party in power, and the general opinion is that many of the enumerators showed themselves to be incompetent. The census of New York (city), 200,000 short of the true number, is a proof of this."

The census of 1890, like every other census which has been taken in the United States, was the work of the party charged with the administration of the country. The Government very properly selects its agents from its own supporters; and the question of fitness was quite as much considered in 1890 as in 1850, or 1860, or 1880. As for the population of New York City, Mr. Reclus ought to know that there were three separate counts made within a few months, and that each count gave a different result. Hundreds of thousands of persons pour into and pass out of New York every twenty-four hours; and no enumeration has ever been made within that time. The count was in each case continued from day to day; and, as a matter of fact, no man knows the population of New York City.

The decline in the birth-rate among the native Americans, and more especially among the New Englanders, is accompanied by an increase in the number of celibates. Mr. Reclus makes the following comparative statement of the natural increase, exclusive of immigration:

1860 to 1880....	.....	18.5 per cent., each 10 years.
1880 to 1890.....	.....	14.4 " " for 10 years.

Of 100 Yankee marriages, he says, 20 are without issue; and but for the immigrants the country would be depopulated. The birth-rate among the native Americans of Massachusetts does not exceed 18 per cent.; among the immigrants it rises to 54 per cent. Every year modifies the American race.

Mr. Reclus closes with a review of the resources, industry, commerce, railways, social condition and education, and an account of the government and administration of the United States. He writes without prejudice and his work, taken as a whole, contains a vast amount of information, arranged in order and proportion; but, with all his industry and ability and his real knowledge, he is so often inaccurate that the reader learns to distrust every statement which he is not in a position to verify.

The amazing assertion, already quoted, as to the proportion of white blood in the colored people is the gravest of Mr. Reclus's misstatements, but it is only one among many, for which charity can find no excuse. Two instances may be added to those already given.

On p. 275 he presents a map of Charleston, S. C., and with this map before him he writes on the next page: "The two broad estuaries of Ashley and Cooper, bathing the city on the north and on the south, unite to the east of the peninsula and form a very safe roadstead." \* . . .

The two rivers flow from the north to the south, the Cooper on the east, and the Ashley on the west of the city of Charleston, and north of the city there is nothing but land.

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\* Les deux larges estuaires d'Ashley et de Cooper, baignant la ville au nord et au sud, se réunissent à l'est de la péninsule et forment une rade très sûre. . . .  
(*Les États-Unis*, p. 276.)

A besetting sin with Mr. Reclus is his ambition to be wise above what is written. On p. 643 he describes Benicia: ". . . One of them, Benicia, once an Indian 'Venice,' became the official capital of California." \* . . .

The first condition for a Venice, Italian or Indian, is the presence of water, penetrating the land in every direction, so as to form low-lying islands. Benicia is built on solid land, raised above high water, with a front on the Strait of Carquines; and it has neither lagoon, nor canal, nor island. The place is no more like Venice than it is like Gibraltar. Mr. Reclus saw that Benicia was a form of the Spanish name for Venice, and, without looking around him, he calmly invented a history in three words, apparently full of archæological knowledge, and has now published it to mislead mankind; † for his name carries weight with those who have not read his book with attention.

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\* . . . l'une d'elles, Benicia, ancienne "Venise" indienne, devint la capitale officielle de la Californie. . . .

† The story of Benicia is told by Mr. H. H. Bancroft, in his *History of the Pacific States, Vol. XVII.*, pp. 670-674: "At the end of 1846 M. G. Vallejo and Robert Semple devised the scheme of building a new city on the Strait of Carquines. For this purpose on December 22d, V. deeded to S. an undivided half of a tract of 5 square miles of the Soscol rancho, the deed being put on record at Sonoma and S. F. The town was to be named Francisca, in honor of Vallejo's wife, Doña Francisca Benicia Carrillo. . . . the change to Benicia is announced in the issue (of the *Californian*) of the 19th (June, 1847), etc., etc."